



LITTLE HOOVER COMMISSION

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For Additional Information Contact:

James P. Mayer
Executive Director
(916) 445-2125

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James P. Mayer
Executive Director

ALCOHOL AND DRUG ABUSE TREATMENT RECOMMENDATIONS TO BE RELEASED

The Little Hoover Commission on Tuesday urged state leaders to develop a strategy for reducing the cost and misery of drug and alcohol addiction and expanding the quality and quantity of treatment.

The Commission concluded that existing resources could be far better used if prevention, treatment and enforcement efforts were better coordinated, especially if high quality treatment programs were available for those who could most benefit and those imposing the greatest burdens on other public programs.

"In previous studies the Commission recognized that the abuse of alcohol and drugs is having an enormous impact on the health and well-being of Californians, and imposing tremendous fiscal costs on government," said Commission Chairman Michael Alpert. "The evidence gathered in this study documents that the majority of child abuse and domestic violence cases involve drugs or alcohol. From prisons to emergency rooms, addiction is costing us billions of dollars each year."

One study calculated the addiction-related losses to government agencies and private enterprises in California at \$32 billion a year. Another analysis calculated that in a recent year some \$11 billion of the state General Fund was spent responding to the problems of addiction.

Most of the resources are spent dealing with the consequences of drug and alcohol abuse – such as health and foster care, Alpert said. At the same time, people are routinely turned away from publicly funded treatment programs. Very few treatment programs are available for young people, even those at high risk of abusing drugs.

Researchers have estimated that some 2.3 million Californians need treatment. Of them, approximately 1.3 million would qualify for publicly funded treatment. In fiscal year 2001-02, \$733 million in state and federal dollars were spent on publicly funded treatment in California, and about 360,000 people were served.

California has significantly expanded treatment programs in recent years, but mostly for criminal offenders. These expansions were based on evidence that treatment programs can cost-effectively break the cycle of addiction and incarceration.

The Commission concluded that the initial implementation of Proposition 36 – the voter approved initiative that diverts drug offenders from jails to treatment – is showing some signs of success. But California needs to take the next step: aligning all drug and alcohol-related efforts to a strategy based on which programs work the best to reduce the human and fiscal costs of addiction. The Commission recommended that a council of community and state leaders be given the task of developing a strategy and coordinating the dozens of state and local programs attempting to control alcohol and other drugs.

“The evidence is clear that treatment can be a cost-effective, socially responsible and humane solution,” said Commissioner Daniel Hancock, who chaired the Commission’s subcommittee for the study. “But public agencies have been so concerned about expanding the supply of treatment, that we haven’t paid enough attention to the quality of treatment.”

The Commission made several recommendations for improving the quality of treatment:

- Encouraging communities to assess the needs for treatment, reallocate resources to fill the gaps in treatment needs, and work with community and civic organizations to increase the resources available for treatment.
- Accelerating efforts by the State and counties to measure the performance of treatment programs, ensure a well-qualified workforce, and provide technical assistance so providers can properly employ proven treatment methods.
- Linking treatment with job placement, housing, mental health, education and other existing services – increasing the performance of all of those programs by making sure clients become healthy and self-sufficient.

The consequences of substance abuse are so severe, and the potential for treatment so great, that the Commission believes the ultimate goal should be to ensure quality treatment for everyone who could benefit. This goal cannot be obtained by government action alone. Rather, civic leadership will be essential to target public and private resources, build public understanding and support, and engineer the necessary changes in treatment and other supportive programs. As treatment improves, the Commission suggested the State could reallocate savings from substance abuse successes.

The Little Hoover Commission is a bipartisan and independent state agency charged with recommending ways to increase the efficiency and effectiveness of state programs. The Commission’s recommendations are sent to the Governor and the Legislature. To obtain a copy of the report, *For Our Health & Safety: Joining Forces to Defeat Addiction*, contact the Commission or visit its Web site: www.lhc.ca.gov.